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CAN APPLIED LINGUISTS DO ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS?

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CAN APPLIED LINGUISTS DO ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS?

Brian Parkinson (IALS)

Abstract

Eight subjects who had used 'study packs' in their learning of French and Italian were interviewed by colleagues of the teachers who wrote them. This article presents, not the findings of the interviews, but an analysis of attempts at an 'ethnographic' interviewing strategy, entailing inter alia an open-ended approach and adoption of an 'outsider' role. A coding system designed to measure 'ethnographicity', with sample codings and descriptive statistics, is presented, together with subjective analyses of sample interviews. The surprising and highly provisional conclusion is that 'insider' interviewers can sometimes achieve similar results to ethnographers, but by rather different means.

1. Introduction

This article is one product of a research and development project at IALS concerned with distance learning study packs for intermediate students of French and Italian. The other products are the study packs themselves, in French (Mulphin 1991) and Italian (Dawson and Peyronel 1991), and a summary - not intended for publication - of learners' attitudes to these materials and to more general issues of distance learning and self-study (Howard 1992). This article is based on the same interviews as Howard's summary, but it deals, not with primary research findings on learner attitude etc., but with secondary or 'meta-research' issues, explained further below, concerning interviewer behaviour and the subjects' perception of the interviewers.

The study packs consisted of an audio-tape with several foreign-language interviews and a written booklet with a variety of exercises based on this material plus some reading-based exercises. They were supported by a marking service: students could send in and receive correction and feedback on written exercises, and also (though this was rarely done in practice) a taped oral composition. They also filled in a 'diary page' describing when, where and how they used the materials.

Materials and feedback were free to the students, as this was a pilot version to be revised in the light of their comments and performance. The materials were written from January to June 1991 and piloted from April to August 1991. It was not pure 'distance learning' as many students continued to come to classes, but their distance work was not normally discussed in class, only written feedback being given in envelopes. Other students were not attending class during the pilot period. A telephone tutoring service was offered to supplement written feedback but was scarcely used.

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Evaluation of the pilot was by two kinds of interview, 'short interviews' and 'long interviews'; assignment of students to each type was random as far as possible but constrained by student availability for long interviews. All interviews were in English. Intended length of the short interviews was about 10 to 15 minutes, long interviews 45 to 60 minutes, but this varied in practice and some 'short' interviews were longer than some 'long' ones. The short interviews were conducted by the French/Italian teachers who wrote the material and were intended to provide formative information for any necessary revision; the long interviews were conducted by Ron Howard in the role of 'distance learning coordinator' and Brian Parkinson in the role of 'project research adviser', and were intended to be broadly 'ethnographic', to illuminate more general issues of how distance learning materials are perceived and used by students. It was hoped that by presenting ourselves (RH/BP) as 'outsiders' - we were not the writers, though we had advised them - we would get an, in some sense, truer picture of such matters.

2. The ethnographic interview

The ethnographic interview (see e.g. Spradley 1979) is intended as a solution to a well-known methodological problem of interviewing: that the interviewers set the agenda, the interviewees tell them what they think they want to hear, and so there is no real insight into the life-world of the interviewees. Ethnographic interviewers try to treat their subjects as teachers and themselves as learners, thus gaining insight into the subjects' life-world.

We are not professional ethnographers, our previous experience of ethnography was very limited (BP) or none (RH), and full-scale ethnography is not possible in a single interview, so the approach described below is very much a 'diluted' version of that advocated by Spradley. (It was diluted even further for RH as he had a specific conscious agenda in his role as distance-learning coordinator. I had no conscious agenda, but quite possibly - like any interviewer? - an unconscious one.) Nevertheless, we both tried to direct the interview along generally ethnographic lines, particularly in its early stages. The extent of our success is the main topic of this article.

The ethnographic approach, as we interpreted it and planned to implement it, was as follows:

(i) We would stress that we were not members of the course-writing team, and had only a limited knowledge of the course materials. The interviewees were to treat us as completely ignorant, and teach us, as they would a complete outsider (e.g. a newspaper reporter), about the materials and how they had used them.

(ii) We did not, except incidentally, want specific information on how to revise these study packs. Rather, we were interested in the general idea of distance learning of languages and 'what it means to you'.

(iii) We did not have a pre-set schedule of questions, which we had to get through. Instead, we would encourage them to 'set your own agenda' and say whatever they considered worth saying about the materials.

(iv) We did, however, have certain guidelines. We would be interested to hear about:

(a) their language learning in general, including objectives

(b) the place of distance learning, and of the study packs, within that learning

(c) a description of the materials as well as a reaction to them

(d) perception of the intended purpose, and success or otherwise, of each general kind of element or activity in the materials - they were to say what the different kinds were.

(v) Where we - especially RH - had a specific 'agenda' of questions we would try to keep these to the end of the interview, and to keep the first and longer part maximally 'ethnographic'.

3. The methodological problem

In the examples described by Spradley (and others, going back to Malinowski 1922) ethnography is possible because the interviewers have a lot to learn - they genuinely do not know about the terminology and customs of the community studied.

We too have a lot to learn - we genuinely do not know how ordinary people learn languages - but our task is more difficult in a way because we are in danger of being perceived, and even of perceiving ourselves, as 'experts'. Even if not intimately acquainted with the materials being discussed, we are professionals in the field: the interviewees are likely to know this, and if we try to disclaim or minimise our experience and expertise we are likely to be perceived as, and to feel, dishonest, thus distorting the interview. Does this mean that one cannot do ethnographic interviews in an area close to one's own specialisation? Or is there in practice no problem, with interviewees able to talk exactly as to someone outside the field, and interviewers able to adopt a 'naïve' perspective?

I did not expect to answer such a big question from such a slender empirical base: I hoped merely to offer some illuminative examples, simple statistics and insights which might help future workers in this area.

4. Data and data analysis

The data consists of the transcripts of eight 'long interviews' (see above), four conducted by RH and four by BP.

I decided to analyse these in the following way:

(i) To generate a list of numbered categories of utterance which I considered relevant to the question of whether the interviewer was adopting an ethnographic perspective, a language expert perspective, or some other perspective, and whether the interviewee was perceiving him as expert, outsider or in some other way. The system would not categorise all utterances but only those, probably a minority, relevant to this issue.

(ii) To test the reliability of these categories by asking colleagues from outside the project to assign a random sample of utterances to one (or none) of them.

(iii) To generate a profile of each of the eight interviews by coding the appearance of each of the numbered categories in each turn of the interview.

(iv) To record my own subjective impressions, and if possible also colleagues' impressions, of the degree of 'ethnographicity' of each interview, and to compare these with the picture given by the numbered profile.

(v) To attempt generalisations on the factors which appear to influence the ethnographicity of an interview, and on how far such information is recoverable from interview data.

This programme is far from complete and the results below are partial and provisional. In particular, no formal reliability trials have yet occurred.

5. Coding system and examples

(Numbers in examples refer to interviews, pages, turns: thus 1, 7, 5 = interview 1, page 7, turn 5. The original categories have been renumbered, and in some cases collapsed, for this presentation.)

5.1 'A' codings

These are categories of interviewer utterance or part-utterance which seem conducive, or intended as conducive, to the interview proceeding along ethnographic lines.

A1 Disclaiming or minimising personal experience of language learning

> *"... what I'm particularly interested in is to try and find out a little bit about what it's like to learn a language by itself. This is actually something I've never attempted to do so I'm completely ignorant ..." (1, 1, 1)*

A2 Disclaiming or minimising knowledge of project

> *"Now it's very important to treat me as completely ignorant, to assume that I know nothing at all about these materials. In fact I don't know a lot." (4, 1, 1)*

A3 Asking for information about materials

> *"Is there a key for this bit?" (5, 6, 6)*

A4 Referring to and inviting expansion of respondent's written comments

> *"And you mostly seem to have studied in periods of between half an hour and one and a half hours ... Do you find this an ideal time? (4, 8, 4 and 4, 8, 6).*

A5 Asking for information on foreign language (vocabulary) in materials

"What's 'elenco', 'elenco'?" (7, 12, 8)

A6 Giving respondent control over course of interview

"There's no fixed list of questions. It's really up to you to say whatever you think important." (3, 1, 1)

A7 Sympathetic echoing

"Mmhm. Right. OK. Em ... you said you found it difficult to organise time to do homework for the normal ... normal classes?" (2, 6, 4)

(5 other, infrequent 'A' categories (A8 to A12) are not separately defined in this report, and are conflated in the table (section 7) as 'A other'.)

5.2 'B' codings

These are categories of interviewer utterance or part-utterance which seem to indicate an (intentional or unintentional) deviation from the ethnographic pattern.

B1 Identifying self with materials writers

"Well, the aim is to have six units altogether, and if you can appreciate that one took quite a lot of [time?]" (1, 10, 16)

B2 Revealing knowledge of or views on content and purpose of materials

"It wasn't intended to be a test at all. No. It was to help you." (1, 4, 16)

B3 Offering to interpret materials or give answers to questions in materials

"On the other hand maybe all they wanted you to decide was whether he was a professional man or [...] a labourer." (5, 10, 14)

B4 Revealing or emphasising own knowledge/experience as language teacher

"Now I teach English you see and I do something similar" (7, 13, 2)

B5 Encouraging the interlocutor, more as teacher-to-learner than as interviewer-to-interviewee

"As you say with unit 2, 3 and 4 of course you'll know next time." (1, 4, 6)

B6 (Giving impression of) going through a checklist of pre-set questions, including follow-ups

"And what did you think of the format? The different colours ... ?" (3, 7, 15)

B7 Leading questions

"So sometimes your predictions were right and sometimes they were wrong but even when they were wrong they didn't stop you from learning? (3, 3, 2)

B8 Completing respondent's unfinished utterances

R *"No, no, no, I, I, I ... was listening ..."*

I *"You were listening specifically to those pros and cons." (1, 8, 1 and 1, 8, 2)*

B9 Imposing own structure on interview

"We'll come back to reading later on, but in the listening [...] the first thing you do then is these predictions?" (3, 4, 10)

(4 other, infrequent 'B' categories (B10 to B13) are not separately defined in this report, and are conflated in the table as 'B other'.)

5.3 'C' codings

These are categories of respondent utterance or part-utterance which seem to indicate acceptance of (or accidental compliance with) an ethnographic pattern for the interview, or at least some aspect of this.

C1 Teaching the interviewer about the materials

"Andrea uses different impersonal forms and [you] listen to the tape and find similar ones." (7, 14, 1)

C2 Informing the interviewer about own performance on the materials (without persistent self-deprecation - cf. D3)

"No, I understood the statement. I had no problem with that one at all." (7, 12, 3)

C3 Criticism of materials

"This particular one had a fault in it. It had a bad echo." (4, 1, 2)

C4 Suggestions for improving materials or methods

"The tendency was to look for one of these answers [...] whereas it was a paraphrase of the answer [...] Perhaps ... the question should say 'It may not be the exact answer'." (3, 11, 8 and 3, 11, 10)

C5 Teaching the interviewer a point of language (vocabulary)

"To box. 'Attenuare' means to extenuate basically ..." (7, 12, 11)

C6 Introducing a new topic (usually some aspect of own learning habits), unprompted or in response to open question

> *"Interestingly enough, I got a [commercial tape course] two months [ago] [...] you're none the wiser, after three months." (1, 13, 13)*

C7 Contradicting interviewer assumption

I *"Half listening and half reading and writing was it?"*

R *"I think it was more listening" (4, 3, 8 and 4, 4, 1)*

(3 other, infrequent 'C' categories (C8 to C10) are not separately defined in this report, and are conflated in the table as 'C other.)

5.4 'D' codings

These are categories of respondent utterance or part-utterance which seem to indicate failure to perceive or non-acceptance of an ethnographic pattern for the interview, or at least some aspect of this.

D1 Use of 'you' or 'your' to refer to the materials or similar

> *"I think it was your ... eh ... introduction was very good." (1, 3, 9)*

D2 Ignoring interviewer's professions of ignorance and statements of interview purpose by answering solely in terms of 'what I liked/disliked about materials' when asked to describe them

I *"Could you tell me then first of all roughly what the study packages are? I mean what kinds of things you find in them, what you do with them?"*

R *"Em ... I found it excellent ..." (4, 1, 1 and 4, 1, 2)*

D3 Extreme self-deprecation in describing performance, i.e. assertions to the effect that 'materials are wonderful, I am stupid'

> *"It's a very good introduction [...] I couldn't have risked my thoughts [...] I found it difficult to talk [...] I was not good at writing down correctly [...] I really felt the study package good [...] Your introduction was very good [...] I got a bit panicky ... I don't think I understood the question [...] I sort of got a bit panicky [...] I was panicking [...] But it was good ... it was good practice."*
> (Spread over several turns, interview 1, pages 2-4)

(3 other, infrequent 'D' categories (D4 to D6) are not separately defined in this report, and are conflated in the table as 'D other'.)

6. Sample codings

To give a flavour of the analysis, I now give complete sequential codings on two interviews, those discussed in section 8.

Complete turns without any A/B/C/D categories are coded 'I' for interviewer turns, 'R' for respondent turns: this means that nothing obviously 'ethnographic' or 'unethnographic' occurred. Commas separate turns, dashes separate multiple codings within one turn. Page numbers, originally included to assist checking, are retained to give some idea of equal intervals, as turn length varies greatly.

Interview 1

A1, C7, A7, R, A7, C6-D1-C6, A4, C8, B13, C6, A7, C6-C6-C6, (page 2) C4, A7, C4-C6, A1-A3, C1, A8, D3, A2, R, I, R, I, R, I, C2, A7, (page 3) R, B10, R, I, R, A4, R, B11, D1-D3, B3, D1-D3-D3, I, D3, B3, C2, A7, D3, A7, (page 4) C3, B8, C3, A9, D3, B5, D3, A7, R, B12, D4, I, D3, A7, R, B2, (page 5) C4, A7, C4, A7, R, I, R, I, D1, C6, I, R, I, R, I, R, I, R, A6, R, (page 6) I, C6, B8, R, A6, D5, A6, C1, A3, D3, I, R, A6, C2, I, (page 7) C1, A10, C2, A10, C2, I, C2-C2-D3, C2, A10, R, A10, (page 8) C7, B8, R, I, D3, C2, I, R, B3, C2, A7, C2, I, C2, A7, (page 9) C2, A7, C2, A7, C1, A7, C2, A7, C2, A7, C2, I, R, I, R, I, R, A6, (page 10) C1-C2, B5, C2, I, C6, R, I, R, I, B2, D3, I, D1, B1, D1-D3, (page 11) B1, R, I, C2-D6, I, C9, I, C9, I, R, B6, C6, (page 12) B6, R, I, R, B12, C3, B1, R, I, R, I, R, B6, C6, I, C6, B4, R, I, R, A7, (page 13) R, B6, C6-C6, A7, R, B6, R, I, C6, B6, R, B6, R, B6, C6, A7, (page 14) C6-C6-C6, B1, R, B6, R, I, R, B6, R, B6, R, B1, (page 15) R, B6, C6, I, R, B6, R, I, R, B5, R, B1, D1, I, R, I, R, (page 16) B6, R, I, R, I, R, B7, R, B7, D1.

Interview 7

I, R, I, R, A2, (page 2) C1-C2-C8-C2, I, C6, (page 3) A3, C2, I, R, I, C3-D1, A9-B12, R, I, C3, A6, (page 4) R, I, R, A4, R, A4, R, I, R, (page 5) I, C2, I, (inaudible section), (page 6) C2, A7, C2, I, R, I, R, A4, C3, I, C3, I, C3, I, (page 7) R, I, R, A4, R, A4, C2, I, R, (page 8) B7, C2, I, R, I, C2, A6, R, I, C2, I, C2, I, (page 9) R, A3, C1, I, C2, I, C2, B7, C7, I, R, A3, C1, I, R, B7, R, A3, (page10) C1, A3, C1, I, C1, I, C1-C2, I, R, I, (page 11) C1-C2, I, C2, B2, C2, I, R, I, R, I, R, I, C1, I, C2, I, (page 12) C2-C1, B7, C7-C2, I, C2, I, C2, A5, C5, A5, C5, A5, C5, I, R, B3, (page 13) R, B3-B4, R, B3, R, B3, R, B3, R, A7, R, B3, C6, I, C6, I, R, A3, (page 14) C1-C2, I, R, B7, R, I, C2, A3, C1, A3, C1, I, C1, I, R, I, R, I, C1-C2, I, C2, (page 15) I, C6-C4, A3, C6, A3, C6, I, C1-C2, A5, (page 16) C5, A5, C5-C1-C2, A3, C1, A3, C1, I, C2, I, R, I, R, I, (page 17) C1, I, R, I, C1-C2, I, C4, A7, C4, A7, C4, I, (page 18) R, I, R, I, C2, I, C1, A6, R, B6, R, B6, R, I, R, I, R, B6, (page 19) R, B6, R, I, C4, B6, R, I, R.

7. Overall coding statistics

The table below summarises the frequency of the main coding categories across the interviews so far coded. Brief labels are given, but see section 5 for full descriptions and examples.

Interview	RH Interviews					BP Interviews					Grand
Category	1	5	6	7	Total	2	3	4	8	Total	Total
A1 Disclaim experience	2	2		0	4	0	0	0		0	4
A2 Disclaim knowledge	1	1		1	3	0	3	3		6	9
A3 Ask re. materials	2	12		12	26	0	9	9		18	44
A4 Refer to components	2	3		5	10	0	6	4		10	20
A5 Ask vocabulary	0	0		5	5	0	0	0		0	5
A6 Give control	5	2		3	10	2	4	2		8	18
A7 Echoing	21	4		4	29	5	19	4		28	57
A - Other	6	1		1	8	3	3	2		8	16
A - Total	39	25		31	95	10	44	24		78	173
B1 Identify	6	0		0	6	0	0	1		1	7
B2 Reveal knowledge	2	12		1	15	1	0	0		1	16
B3 Interpret	3	3		6	12	0	0	0		0	12
B4 Reveal experience	1	3		1	5	0	0	0		0	5
B5 Teacher role	3	2		0	5	0	0	0		0	5
B6 Checklist	13	7		5	25	2	7	1		10	35
B7 Leading questions	2	2		5	9	1	7	0		8	17
B8 Completing	3	0		0	3	0	0	0		0	3
B9 Own structure	0	3		0	3	1	5	0		6	9
B - Other	5	0		1	6	0	0	0		0	6
B - Total	38	32		19	89	5	19	2		26	115

C1 Teaching (materials)	5	12		22	39	0	17	10		27	66
C2 Own performance	20	39		32	91	5	9	0		14	105
C3 Criticism	3	3		5	11	3	1	5		9	20
C4 Suggestions	4	1		5	10	2	4	0		6	16
C5 Teaching (vocabulary)	0	0		5	5	0	0	0		0	5
C6 New topic	21	2		6	29	0	9	3		12	41
C7 Contradicting	2	2		2	6	3	0	4		7	13
C - Other	3	0		1	4	0	0	1		1	5
C - Total	58	59		78	195	13	40	23		76	271
D1 Use of 'you'	8	0		1	9	2	3	1		6	15
D2 'What I liked'	0	1		0	1	0	2	4		6	7
D3 Self-deprecation	14	2		0	16	3	0	19		22	38
D - Other	3	0		0	3	0	0	1		1	4
D - Total	25	3		1	29	5	5	25		35	64
ABCD Total	160	119		129	408	33	108	74		215	623
I 'Neutral' interviewer turns	43	59		66	168	12	36	37		85	253
R 'Neutral' respondent turns	57	56		51	164	13	39	27		79	243
GRAND TOTAL	260	234		248	740	58	183	138		379	1119

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8. Sample subjective analyses (and transcript extract)

This section contains my impressionistic analyses, completed before coding (but after coding other interviews) and not thereafter edited, of what appear to be the two 'extreme cases' among the interviews analysed so far, followed by an extract from the transcript of one of the interviews, and summary comments on the others.

8.1 Interview 1

Respondent does sometimes set her own agenda, but the main content is persistent self-deprecation: the materials must be perfect, she must be stupid when she can't do something. Sometimes a hint of criticism of materials, but so mitigated by self-criticism as to be uninterpretable. Does not perceive interviewer as outsider - repeatedly says 'your' (notes etc.), ignores disclaimers.

Interviewer begins quite 'ethnographically', but quite soon moves (is forced?) into role of supportive teacher/'expert'. Last part is highly structured list of questions.

8.2 Interview 7

Worked well as ethnography. Interviewer made a convincing self-introduction: "I've already interviewed 3 people so I know a bit ... ". His invitation for general comments produced a series of R-initated topics (audio quality, self-discipline, importance of prediction etc.) with long R turns. R is confident enough not to blame herself for problems.

Works even better when, half-way through interview, they reach parts of the material that R did not fully understand. Extended mutual help: R contributes her knowledge of Italian, I his experience as a language teacher, and they solve problems and explore issues and perceptions together as equal partners.

A slightly shortened transcript extract is now given to illustrate the above.

Ron: *It says, "This is a ... " What's 'elenco', 'elenco'?*

Linda: *A list.*

Ron: *"... a list of ways of ..."*

Linda: *... to box. 'Attenuare' means to extenuate basically [...] that Andrea is using, is emphasising these phrases with words [...] and prepare a list of the way the ... these phrases have been used relating to the time, a film, a book that ... I just couldn't understand ... (indecipherable) ...*

Ron: *... (indec) ... "tua opinione" so you had to express your own opinion on something.*

Linda: *Yeah.*

Ron: *So maybe you just had to use these phrases in a sentence that you made up about something from your own experience, do you think?*

Linda: *... possibly, possibly. I ... just couldn't get a sense of exactly what I was ... what we were expected to do ... em ... and I didn't understand the example which was "non sono cattivi pero" and then what I presumed to be the response to that was "Lui non è stupido pero è ... (indec) ... non li capisci" I thought well he's not sort of, he's not being 'cattivi', he's being 'stupido' so why ... why is that ...*

Ron: *Excuse me ... (indec) ... I mean, I'm not sure what Giulia had in mind, but I think probably it's one of these substitution things. Now I teach English you see and I do something similar ...*

Linda: *... and you use another word that means ...*

Ron: *... (indec) ... No, no. It could be something quite different 'cos you're using the grammatical structure ...*

Linda: *... grammatical structure ...*

Ron: *... so it's probably known ... known ... (indec) ... so it's like saying 'he's not ... but ...' or 'she's not ... but ...'*

Linda: *'not ... but ...' ...*

Ron: *... or 'they're not ... but ...' and you put in ... (indec) ...*

Linda: *Yeah. Even though ... (indec) ... doesn't understand certain things there*

Ron: *Yeah.*

Linda: *Yeah. (7, 12, 8 to 7, 13, 11)*

8.3 Other interviews

These ranged between the extremes above: interview 4 almost as 'bad' as interview 1, interviews 3 and 5 sometimes as 'good' as interview 7 but without the mutual exploration, and perhaps spoilt by some long interviewer turns, e.g.

> *"Sorry, before we go on - you didn't think it mattered that you were a wee bit wide of the mark? You don't think you would have perhaps understood more on the first hearing if you had kind of been spot on with your prediction?" (5, 3, 2)*

Interview 2 was rather a non-event as the respondent had only used a small part of the material; the other interviews are not yet analysed.

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9. Conclusion

Until I analysed interview 7, I felt that nothing very clear had emerged on the meta-research issues. I had mentally reduced the factors affecting ethnographicity to three main ones - respondent's freedom to direct course of interview, respondent's perception of interviewer's areas of knowledge and ignorance, respondent's ideas about interviewer's allegiance and what interviewer wants to hear - but was still unclear about the relative importance of these and how they interact. I felt that we had been partially successful: having extensive experience of 'question schedule' interviews, I knew that the information yielded by these freer interviews was much richer, often more believable, and fulfilled the aim of insight into the life-world of the learners. But in other ways, especially in our attempt to disclaim expertise, we had obviously been clumsy and far from totally successful.

As soon as I read interview 7 I felt: this is the way to do it! It was exactly what ethnographers talk about, a 'lesson' given by Linda the interviewee. But it worked because the interviewer did *not* behave like a traditional ethnographer: he not only admitted, but frequently asserted, his expertise, but in such a way that Linda's expertise was also needed, so real communication took place. So, to my great surprise, I have (at least to my own satisfaction) a fairly clear answer to my question: no, applied linguists cannot do ethnography in their own field, but they can *at least sometimes* achieve a similar result by slightly different means.

I believe that similar approaches could have improved the already fairly satisfactory interviews (3 and 5) but still do not know how the others could have been "rescued". The sex (male) and age (42 and 54) of the interviewers probably contributed to the reaction of the (female) interviewees, and a same-sex interviewer, especially one more clearly distanced from 'authority', might have got better results.

It is impossible to provide any fixed algorithm or set of procedures for conducting ethnographic interviews: an element of 'playing by ear' is always involved. The use of systematic coding, as in the present study, should not be seen as an attempt to eliminate this element, but rather to emphasise the difficulty of this research technique and the need for interviewer self-awareness. Future researchers using ethnographic interviews should consider beginning with a pilot study and analysing pilot data from this perspective.

The coding system offered here is not claimed to be fully satisfactory: readers of an earlier draft of this article have suggested that certain categories may reflect individual interviewer style rather than ethnographicity or its opposite, and that the disregarding of paralanguage and of sequential patterns are limitations. It will be noticed that I have not, in the present article, appealed directly to evidence from the coding system, and indeed I found myself relying much more, or more immediately, on subjective analyses when formulating general conclusions. But the coding system has helped and (perhaps in revised form) will help in three ways: it guided my analysis to the point where I could take these impressionistic short-cuts; it has revealed detailed patterns of interest for a fuller report - for example, that in the 'successful' interview 7 leading questions were often followed immediately by respondent contradictions; and it will help me and, I hope, others to validate the provisional and perhaps premature conclusions and supply a more rounded picture.

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